

Teaching Dooyeweerd through Stories

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In my research at WYSOCS my colleague Arthur Jones and I have spent time marinating in the delightful story of English chocolate manufacturer George Cadbury who was born in 1839 and died in 1922. Cadbury, of course, was not familiar with Dooyeweerd's philosophy but he did grasp the rainbow richness of God's Word/Law at the naïve, pre-theoretical point of view.

George and his brother Richard were not just concerned about the quality and profitability of their chocolate. As Christians both men believed that "the happiness and well-being of their employees was one of the chief aims of the business". They were profit-sensitive without being profit-driven.

What was it like to work in the Cadbury chocolate factory? Well from 1866 until 1916 each day began with Bible readings and prayers for all . The working day was considerably shorter than many other factories of the time. Cadbury was the first business enterprise to introduce the Saturday half day holiday (five and a half day working week) and were pioneers in adopting the custom of closing the factory on Bank Holidays.

In 1879, when the premises became too small, the brothers decided to build a factory in the country. They called this new site "Bournville". On this site the brothers provided football and cricket fields, a huge playground for children, swings and even an open air swimming pool. Utterly unheard of at the time!

Employees were encouraged to have fun and the sporting and recreational facilities were first-rate. Sometimes George would tell his employees to knock off early and everyone would enjoy playing and watching a cracking game of cricket on company time. On one occasion the brothers took all eleven wickets in a match. George once bought his employees a bicycle of the bone-shaker type, which they used to learn to ride on during the lunch-break. Sometimes half a dozen employees would be presented with a football and instructed to go and enjoy a football game in the local park!

Writing in 1871, George's sister recorded in her diary that George and Richard took the girls from the factory rambling over the Lickey Hills. Happy and exhausted the ramblers returned to the Cadbury mansion for tea and cakes. What a superb vignette of God's kingdom rule breaking in to economic life.

Inside the factory there were warm cloakrooms for drying wet clothes and kitchen facilities for cooking food. The brothers also built superb houses for their employees. Every house had a spacious garden for growing vegetables. Fruit trees were planted and the garden dug over before each new owner moved in. Trees were planted along the wide roads.

Later George built schools and a shopping area for his employees. Cadbury campaigned for old-age pensions and fought against the brutal 'commodification' of so many working people. He even paid £60,000 of his own money into pension funds for his employees! When he died in 1922, 16,000 people attended his funeral.

Following Dooyeweerd we know that a chocolate factory has an economic telos or guiding function. Cadbury was indeed a shrewd and canny entrepreneur. He made good profits and yet his factory was 'opened up' in an appropriate way for its sphere (Kuyper) to the ethical aspect (his care for employees) and to the aesthetic (the sheer unexpected delight of playing impromptu cricket games).

Consider Cadbury's innovative plan to build houses and spacious gardens and we glimpse a disclosure of the social aspect. Notice also that his factory was 'opened up' to the pistic/faith aspect. His employees heard Bible readings and prayers. The more astute of these men and women would have connected Cadbury's faith in Jesus Christ to the rich disclosure of the modal aspects (at the pretheoretical level of course). In some sense they were aware that following Jesus in the manufacture of chocolate was full of delightful and unexpected surprises.

At the same time it is easy to understand a factory which is idolatrously 'closed down' to this rich simultaneous realization of norms. Many British factory owners were guilty of absolutising the economic aspect and this cruel idolatry ruined the lives of both the employers and the employees. Consider the following true story.

Elizabeth Bentley worked in a flax mill for the Dickensian-sounding Mr Busk in Leeds. She was born in 1806 and her exhausting labour began for her in the mill at the age of six. She worked from five in the morning until nine at night. She earned a pittance as a "doffer" (removing full spindles of thread or bolts of cloth from the spinning or weaving machinery). She was allowed forty minutes at noon for mealtimes but had no time for breakfast or drinks.

Her home was two miles from the mill - naturally, she had to walk - and if she arrived late in the morning, she would be "quartered". In other words if she was quarter of an hour late, she would lose half an hour's pay. She was never beaten for being late but regularly saw boys beaten for being late. If she slowed down at all at the mill, the foremen would strap her, sometimes severely.

When we ponder the hard and bitter life of Elizabeth Bentley we can begin to savour George Cadbury's fruitful work as a chocolatier in full time service of Christ Jesus, the King. We can also admire Dooyeweerd's Christian philosophy which sheds so much light on every human activity.

We need a book about reformational philosophy which has many such stories. Stories that delight us; stories that shock us. Stories that serve and bring alive

abstract philosophical theory. These stories integrate the naive and the theoretical points of view.